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LETTER DATED 24 AUGUST 1998 FROM THE PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE SUDAN TO THE UNITED NATIONS ADDRESSED TO THE PRESIDENT OF THE SECURITY COUNCIL

Further to my letter dated 23 August 1998 (S/1998/793), please find attached an article published in The Observer of London dated 23 August 1999, in which the paper states that the American President knew that he was bombing a civilian target that is not capable of producing nerve gas, yet he ordered the bombing of the factory (see annex).

I should be grateful if you could circulate the present letter and its annex as a document of the Security Council.

(Signed) Elfatih ERWA
Permanent Representative

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Clinton bombed civilians on purpose

American tests showed no trace of nerve gas at 'deadly' Sudan plant. The President ordered the attack anyway

by Ed Vulliamy Washington
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PRESIDENT Bill Clinton knew he was bombing a civilian target when he ordered the United States attack on a Sudan chemical plant. Tests ordered by him showed that no nerve gas was on the site and two British professionals who recently worked at the factory said it clearly had no military purpose.

The disclosure will deepen the crisis, following the American attacks on Afghanistan and Sudan, in relations between the US and its Muslim allies, which have called on Clinton to produce hard evidence that the attacks had a legitimate relevance to the war against international terrorism.

The US claims that the al-Shifa Pharmaceuticals Industries plant in north Khartoum was producing the ingredients for the deadly VX nerve gas. But Sudan's assertion that it produced 50 per cent of the country's drug requirements is much closer to the truth. On 10 March this year, Britain's Junior Foreign Minister Tony Lloyd told Parliament that the Government could not 'validate' American claims that Sudan was developing chemical weapons and 'is not aware of any fresh or substantiated evidence on the matter'.

US forces flew a reconnaissance mission to test for traces of gas and reported that there were none. Clinton immediately authorised the attack. He was also told the absence of gas would avoid the horrifying spectacle of civilian casualties. Sudan television said yesterday that one of 10 people injured in the attack has died.

Belfast film-maker Irwin Armstrong, who filmed the plant while making a promotional video, said: 'The Americans have got this completely wrong. In other parts of the country I encountered heavy security but not here. I was allowed to wander about quite freely. This is a perfectly normal chemical factory with the things you would expect — stainless steel vats and technicians.'

Tom Carnaffin, of Hexham, Northumberland, who worked as a technical manager from 1992 to 1996 for the plant's owners, the Baaboud family, said: 'I have intimate knowledge of that factory and it just does not lend itself to the manufacture of chemical weapons.

'The Americans claimed that the weapons were being manufactured in the veterinary part of the factory. Unless there have been some radical changes in the last few months, it just isn't equipped to cope with the demands of chemical weapon manufacturing. You need things like airlocks, but this factory just has doors leading out on to the street.

'The factory was being sold to a Saudi Arabian. They are allies of the Americans. I don't think it would look very good if the factory was also manufacturing weapons for Baghdad.'

Sudan desperately needed medicines, he said. 'I almost died while working out there. The loss of this factory is a tragedy for the rural communities.'

The engineer, who has said he will be returning to Sudan soon to carry out more work for the Baaboud family, condemned the American attack and its resulting loss of life.

'It's a funny feeling to think that I had a cup of tea in that place and the guard on the gate who used to say hello to me is very probably now dead. The Baabouds are absolutely gutted about this.'

Crowds in Khartoum yesterday vented their anger against Britain for supporting Clinton, by stoning the British embassy and tearing up the flag.

From Afghanistan, an assurance that British targets will not be included in any retaliatory strikes has come from sources close to Osama bin Laden, the multimillionaire Saudi fundamentalist believed to be behind the bombings of US embassies in Africa.

Bin Laden, who survived the American air strikes on his training camp in Afghanistan, telephoned the editor of the London-based Arabic daily newspaper *al Quds al-Arabi* to say he was only interested in hitting the US and Israel.